Unit Compliance Inspection: What Did We Learn?

In August 2006, the 402d Software Maintenance Group became a full-fledged member of the depot maintenance fraternity by subjecting itself to a Unit Compliance Inspection based on the same checklists as the aircraft, electronics, and commodities groups.

In effect, we were breaking new ground – we had always relied on the robustness of our Level 5 CMMI processes as a reason to be exempt from the standard Air Force maintenance instructions and checklists that our compatriots used. For our core business area (development and maintenance of operational flight programs and automatic test equipment software) that was definitely the case. Our work is centered on processes, not tasks. Our software engineers do not use work control documents nor do our technicians require special skills qualification.

So what do we have in common, and why did we examine our compliance with policy and procedures that were developed for a hardware maintenance environment? The answer is simple: We use tools, equipment, material, and technical data just like everyone else.

Air Force policy on tools is designed to both prevent foreign object damage and to reduce long term costs with better inventory control. Our software integration laboratories use equipment that requires periodic maintenance, calibration, and clear accountability. Material, whether bench stock, shop stock, or floating spares, is better managed when it is sorted, labeled, and regularly inventoried. Finally, technical data can never be accurate if it is not kept current and labeled appropriately.

How much effort was involved in becoming compliant? Tons! We sorted, scrubbed, straightened, labeled, shredded, recycled, shadowed, capped, taped, stamped, inventoried, and signed everything in sight. We inspected our labs from wall to wall with an eye out for safety hazards, excess material, stray tools, equipment overdue for calibrations, and general clutter.

Was it worth it? In the end, yes! While I doubt we'll see much direct benefit from the dozens of appointment letters I signed, the rest of our preparation has made an impact. Our labs are clean and free of clutter. Material, tools, technical data, and equipment are organized and accessible. Eliminating excess cabinets has freed up valuable floor space. Finally, we demonstrated that our CMMI Level 5 processes are compatible with – even complementary to – Air Force maintenance instructions. You can have quality processes and still be compliant.

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Warner Robins Air Logistics Center Co-Sponsor

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The purpose of this theme was to allow CrossTalk to share articles on topics and from authors of special interest to us and I hope to you as well. Mike McNair was kind enough to write an article on some of the key issues to consider when merging hardware and software in *Where Hardware and Software Meet: The Basics*. Our next article by LTC Nanette Patton and Allan Shechet highlights some of the real obstacles that must be overcome when implementing process improvements such as Earned Value Management in *Earned Value Management: Are Expectations Too High?* I think many readers will have a curiosity for Duy Le, Dr. Rayford B. Vaughn, and Dr. Yoginder S. Dandass' article *Developments and Challenges of Internet Development in Vietnam – A General Perspective*. COL Kenneth L. Alford and Steven R. Ditmeyer also consider net-centric concerns in *Net-Centric Operations: Defense and Transportation Synergy*. Finally, as more and more organizations climb the software maturity ladder, I believe it is reasonable to ask, *What's next?* Donald J. Reifer proposes his suggestion in *Profiles of Level 5 CMMI Organizations*.

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Publisher